A
PLACE CALLED
COMMUNITY

by
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Pendle Hill Pamphlet 212

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He was motivated to write this pamphlet, he tells us, for two reasons, "First, I wanted to sort out my experience at Pendle Hill, where I have learned something about what a community is and is not, should and should not be. Second, I thought there was need to write about community in a way not limited to 'commune,' a way which might point to the possibility of community in homes and neighborhoods, schools and places of work, wherever it is that people live their lives." Portions of this essay have appeared in *The Christian Century,* XCIV:9 (March 16, 1977), 252-256.

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We expect a theophany of which we know nothing but the place, and the place is called community.

—Martin Buber

Introduction

Surely Buber's words are prophetic. God comes to us in the midst of human need, and the most pressing needs of our time demand community in response.

How can I participate in a fairer distribution of resources unless I live in a community which makes it possible to consume less? How can I learn accountability unless I live in a community where my acts and their consequences are visible to all? How can I learn to share power unless I live in a community where hierarchy is unnatural? How can I take the risks which right action demands unless I belong to a community which gives support? How can I learn the sanctity of each life unless I live in a community where we can be persons, not roles, to one another?

In contrast to these hard questions the popular image of community is distressingly sentimental. We—especially white, middle-class folk—value community for the personal nurture it promises but ignore its challenges of political and economic · justice. We speak of "life together" in romantic terms which bear little resemblance to the difficult discipline of a common life.

But the problems of our age will yield neither to personalism nor to romance. If the idea of community is to speak to our condition, we must change the terms of the discussion. So I write about community partly to correct the romantic fallacy.

If we seek a dream community, reality will quickly defeat us, and the struggle for community cannot afford such losses.

I write, too, because the religious basis of community is so often ignored, and I believe that religion points not toward fantasy but toward ultimate reality. For the idea of community is at the heart of every great religious tradition. The Hebrew Bible is primarily the narrative of a community making and breaking its covenant with God. The New Testament affirms that the capacity to join with others in a life of prayer and service is one test of receiving God's spirit. The Book of Acts, for example, reports that the formation of a community of goods was among the first fruits of Pentecost:

> All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common: they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the need of each required.
>
> (Acts 2:44-45)

Among Christians, Quakers have special reason to be conscious of community. The saying of Jesus from which the Religious Society of Friends took its name contains a powerful image of the community that is possible between men and women and God:

> You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I call you servants no longer; a servant does not know what his master is about. I have called you friends, because I have disclosed to you everything that I heard from my Father. . . . This is my commandment to you: love one another. (John 15:14-17)

The call to community was clearly a vital part of early Quakerism, beginning with George Fox's vision on Pendle Hill where God showed him ''a great people to be gathered.'' When we recall what Fox wrote just before reporting his vision, it becomes clear that this gathering was to take the form of Christian community. Here Fox says that the church people of his time ''neither knew God, nor Christ, nor the Scriptures

aright; nor had they unity with one another, being out of the power and spirit of God.''

It is no accident, then, that Howard Brinton repeatedly called community one of the four basic testimonies of Friends. Although this essay will not deal explicitly with Quakerism and community until the final section, most of what follows is meant to amplify the meaning of that testimony for our time. I can think of no testimony more important (though risky) for those who care about the human future. In the pages that follow I shall try to show why.

Quest for Community

Much has been made about the quest for community in our day, but our rhetoric is not reflected in our actions. While we honor community with words, the history of the twentieth century has been a determined movement away from life together.

For at least three generations Americans have been in conscious flight from the communities of family and town. Both the extended family and the small town slowed our progress toward a goal we cherish more deeply than we cherish life together: the goal of economic mobility. The small town cannot contain a range of jobs wide enough or tall enough to permit us freedom of movement. And when we do get a chance to move onward and upward, the extended family holds us back.

So we have been drawn toward cities large and complicated enough to meet our economic desires, and toward families small and portable (and even disposable) enough to make mobility possible. Popular sociology portrays us as victims of these ''movements'' and ''trends,'' as if the woes that accompany modernity had been forced upon us. But no. The destruction of intimate community has been at our own hands. It has

corresponded to our own hierarchy of values. My point is not that large cities and small families are wrong; both clearly have their values. My point is that those values stand largely in tension with the value of total and intimate community. As much as we yearn for community, we yearn even more for the social and economic prizes individual mobility can bring.

We can take a first, crucial step away from romance about community by recognizing that it is a value in conflict with other values we hold—and that in our decisions, community usually loses out. How many of us would pass up a job promotion which involved relocation in favor of deepening our local roots? How many of us would want to trade the anonymity of the city (no matter how lonely at times) for the cloying, gossipy, parochial place we imagine smalltown America to be? We must begin by recognizing that our verbal homage to community is only one side of a deep ambivalence that runs through the American character—the other side of which is a celebration of unfettered individualism.

The Resurgence of Individualism

In times past, this American ambivalence was anchored strongly on two sides, for both individualism and community seemed possible. The settlers of the American frontier had to possess both the strength of individuality and the capacity for community. They needed to stand alone and to stand together, and there seemed to be no contradiction between the two. But in our time, individualism has run amok. We remain ambivalent, but one anchor has been tugged loose, and we find ourselves drifting dangerously toward the rocks of autonomy and the isolated self because we can no longer be certain that community is available to us.

The breakdown of confidence in community has been explored by Philip Rieff in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*.

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Rieff argues that community itself once prevented disintegration of the individual personality, for in community each self had its boundaries and its place. Absent were anxieties about whether one was needed, and where; the answers were woven into the very fabric of society. And in the event that a personality did crumble, community itself was the therapy. In community one could find the confining but comforting role which brought life back together.

But with the breakdown of the common life came growing personal disintegration and the need for a therapy which did not depend on community! So, Rieff points out, a new mode of therapy emerged (notably Freudian) aimed at creating individuals who could function without corporate support, persons who could get along without others. As Rieff notes, these are not only the goals of therapy, they are themes reinforced by the therapeutic process itself. For example, the "crisis of transference" is that point at which the patient must learn to become independent even of the therapist. And the sheer expense of therapy is a constant reminder to the patient that aid will not come freely from the community but must be purchased in the market place. Much of modern therapy is premised on the notion that community is no longer available and we had better learn to go it alone.

This theme pervades other areas of modern life. Education is a notable example. Historically, education and community were inseparable. The content of education reflected the community consensus, and at the same time helped the community evolve and perpetuate itself. Today education has become a training ground for competition, rooted in the assumption that community is gone and we must learn to stand on our own two feet. In fact, more than a training ground, education itself has become a competitive arena where winners and losers are determined even before the contest is scheduled to begin.

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It is not only that isolated practices in the schools—like grading on the curve—are so obviously rooted in Social Darwinism. It is not only that when students get together to cooperate on their work, most schools call it "cheating"—so suspect are the communal virtues. Nor is it only that most of us, deep inside, feel that children who are trained to cooperate rather than compete are not well prepared for the "real world." Beneath these surface symptoms is a fundamental fact: our schools perform an economic function more than an educational one; they exist not so much to teach and learn as to play a role in the distribution of scarce goods and resources. Their function, that is, no longer involves reflecting and renewing the community but providing the means by which society can decide who gets what, and how much of it.

The same premise—that community is gone and we must learn to stand alone—can be found in much that passes for the "new spirituality" these days. For in religious life, too, community has disappointed and failed us. Many who understand themselves as religious, or who are open to religious experience, cannot tolerate the church in any of its forms. So the new religions, with their emphasis on the solitary journey of the inward-seeking self, have found many followers.

At their worst, these new religions have made the self not only the vehicle but also the object of the religious quest. In these quarters, psychology is praised for having cut through centuries of theological obfuscation and God is found to be identical with the Self. Not that the self is made in God's image, or that in every self can be found that of God. No, in this new faith God and Self are taken to be one and the same. Lost is the confrontation between God and self, as they become comfortably absorbed into one another. And lost is the sense that the self is defined by participation in communities of covenant. It is no accident that contemporary religious jargon so frequently refers to "getting in touch with one's self."

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Those words replace what another age meant by "seeking the face of God," because we have lost confidence that anything beyond the self exists or can be trusted.

The Risk of Seeking Community

The assumption that community is increasingly hard to find is well founded. It *is* difficult to find or create relationships of duration and reliability in our kind of world. But such realism quickly becomes pernicious: every time we act on that assumption, every time we gird ourselves to go it alone, we create more of the same reality. The assumption that community cannot be counted upon is a self-fulfilling prophecy, for as we act on it we become men and women who do not call others to accountability and cannot be counted on ourselves. "Crackpot realism" is what C. Wright Mills would have called it, for its eventual outcome can only be the war of all against all. We need to find the courage to assert and act upon the hope, however naive, that community can be found, because only by acting "as if" can we create a future fit for human habitation.

We will find that courage only as we come to a new understanding of what it means to seek health for our personal lives. We live in a time of extreme self-consciousness, a time of self-doubt, self-examination, self-help. We seem aware of every inner perturbation, as if we had been born with psychic seismographs capable of measuring each movement along our personal fault lines. Ours is a time in which health is supposed to come by focussing on our selves and by seeking the resources for self-renewal.

But we've got it all backwards! For self-health is one of those strange things in human life which eludes those who aim directly at it, but comes to those who aim elsewhere. It was best said in the words of Jesus: "He who finds his life will

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lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it." So we must learn, in this twisted age, that the ultimate therapy is to identify our own pain with the pain of others, and then band together to resist the conditions that create our common malady.

The ultimate therapy is to translate our private problems into corporate issues. In doing so we will discover that some of our private problems are too trivial to be dignified with public status, and they will fall away. But others, we will discover, are not private at all—they are common to our time. And as we learn to see our own plight in the lives of our sisters and brothers we will begin to find health. Therapy involves identifying and building communities of concern. Only so can we heal ourselves.

All this inverts our conventional wisdom. Most of us fear community because we think it will call us away from ourselves. We are afraid that in community our sense of self will be overpowered by the identity of the group. We pit individuality and community against one another, as if a choice had to be made, and increasingly we choose the former.

But what a curious conception of self we have! We have forgotten that the self is a moving intersection of many other selves. We are formed by the lives which intersect with ours. The larger and richer our community, the larger and richer is the content of the self. There is no individuality without community; thus, the surprising finding that an affluent suburb with all its options, but without community, may nurture individuality less than a provincial village with few choices but a rich community life.

So the way to self, and to self-health, is the way of community. We have lost a true sense of self in our time because we have lost community. But lost things can be found. Community can be rebuilt as more men and women find within themselves the need and the willingness to risk community.

And the risk is only apparent. From where we are, it appears that the chances for community are slim. And once in community, the pain of losing one's fantasies is fierce. But on the other side of all that there is no risk at all, only the confidence that life was meant to be lived together.

Politics of Community

If the ultimate therapy is to build community then building community is the ultimate politics. Community is a place where therapy and politics meet, for here the health of the individual and the health of the group may be seen for the reciprocal realities that they are.

The link between therapy and politics is clear in the problems of loneliness, that painful fact of so many modern lives which community is supposed to cure. But loneliness is not just a personal problem. It has political causes and consequences. We are lonely because a mass society keeps us from engaging one another on matters of common destiny. And loneliness makes us prey to a thousand varieties of political manipulation. Our loneliness renders us not only pathetic but politically dangerous. If we could understand that fact we might create communities which contribute to political and personal health by more fairly distributing the power of decision over our personal and corporate destinies.

Political scientists have long known that community in all its forms plays a key role in the distribution of power. Families, neighborhoods, work teams, churches, and other voluntary associations stand between the lone individual and the power of the central state. They provide the person with a human buffer zone so that he or she does not stand alone against the state's demands. They amplify the individual's small voice so it can be heard by a state which turns deaf when it does not want to listen. In such communities we gain skill at negotiating our

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interest with the interests of the group. If these communities decline in number or in quality the condition known as "mass society" sets in. Mass society is characterized not simply by size, but by the fact that individuals in it do not have organic relations with one another, only a common membership in the nation-state. In mass society the person stands alone against the state, without a network of communal associations to protect personal meaning, to enlarge personal power, or to teach the habits of democracy.

The loneliness of mass men and women is a measure of their political impotence, and given that impotence—that inability to act together—the step from mass society to totalitarianism is short indeed. In a totalitarian society the state exercises careful control over the number and content of intermediary communities so they will not empower individuals to resist the state. In a democracy, as community begins to wither, the conditions are ripe for totalitarianism to take root.

We sadly mistake the task of politics if we focus all our efforts on petitioning or pressuring the institutions of government toward certain ends. The functioning of democratic institutions depends on the existence of a community, a community to which government is accountable, a community which gives people the power to make claims on those who govern. More than that, community is the context in which people come to understand their interrelatedness. Without such understanding people will have no interest in government at all, except as it impinges directly on their self-interest. So community is a precondition of a democratic politics, and the building of community is an essential pre-political task.

But the American condition seems to be one of deepening privatism. Affluence (or the desire to maintain the image of it) draws us into life styles designed to protect us from sight and sound of one another. Goods and services which we might share, or even provide for one another, become individual

consumer items, thus weakening the fabric of community. We are more anxious to protect our roles as consumers than to develop our roles as citizens, more desirous of being able to buy our autonomy than letting our interdependence show.

In truth, of course, we are interdependent, despite our expensive efforts to construct a facade of autonomy. As the world economic crisis deepens, we will continue to learn just how interdependent we are. We will learn how self-defeating is the war of all against all, with each trying to get a more-than-fair-share of the pie.

We have already had intimations of how such an awareness might move us back toward community: At the height of the recent "fuel shortage" people quickly learned to share automobile transportation with their neighbors. But that crisis passed, and the sharing passed with it. As such crises multiply, there will probably be an interim period in which old habits of competition and acquisitiveness will assert themselves with renewed vigor as people struggle to ward off the dawning knowledge that things will never be the same. It will be some time before the world-wide pressure to share becomes so great as to make community the only sensible option. Until then, we can expect more and more of the economic individualism that possesses us now.

So those who cultivate the instincts of community in themselves, and labor to build its external forms, are engaged in a task whose success is critical. The politics and economics of community are fundamental, and until we understand their full implications our image of community will continue to be pleasantly irrelevant. Community means more than the comfort of souls. It means, and has always meant, the survival of species.

True Community or False?

But the longer we sing the praises of community, the more we court another romantic fallacy: that to say "community" is to say "good." Not so. Selma, Cicero, South Boston: these were all communities, but false ones. As we learn the difference between true community and false we will move even farther from sentimentality about the common life.

In fact, the most notable example of false community is the totalitarian society to which the decline of true community leads. In the midst of mass loneliness people yearn to identify with something larger than themselves, something which will redeem their lives from insignificance. They yearn, that is, for community, for that network of human associations which enlarges the individual's life. This hunger runs so deep that even the appearance of community will feed it, and totalitarianism always presents itself as a communal feast for the masses. What was Nazi Germany except a demonic form of community life? What is any brand of nationalism or racism except the idea of community run amok?

The differences between true community and false could be listed at length. For instance, false communities tend to be manipulated by the state, while true community is independent of governmental power. That is, in true communities people will be free to relate to one another in ways that are contrary to established power, while in false communities that power protects itself by setting strict limits on acceptable association.

In false communities the group is always superior to the individual, while in true communities both individual and group have a claim on truth. The critique of individualism in the preceding pages was not intended to degrade the concrete individual, but to insist that the individual needs to be checked and balanced by the group. The converse is also true. The group needs to be checked and balanced by the individual's

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voice, for majorities do not mean truth. In false communities the concrete individual is swallowed up in abstractions about "blood, soil, and race." True communities are built upon the person perceived, not abstractions about persons.

False communities tend to be homogenous, exclusive, and divisive, while true communities strive to unite persons across socially fixed lines. We should be suspicious of any "community" which forms too quickly, too easily, for it is likely to depend on social categories which make not for community but for commonality. And commonality does not nurture the human growth and expansiveness which true community provides.

But beyond all these sociological distinctions between true community and false, there is a theological way of expressing the differences which brings us to the heart of the matter. False communities are idolatrous. They take some finite attribute like race, creed, political ideology, or even manners, and elevate it to ultimacy. They seek security by trying to make timeless that which is temporal; by pretending that which is shaky is firm; by worshiping that which should be viewed critically. They confuse their own power with the power of God and tragically try to use that power to decide questions of life and death. False communities are ultimately demonic, which is not to say that true communities are divine, for both retain their human character. But true communities will take the form of covenant. They will experience both God's mercy and God's judgment in their lives.

These categories are not fixed, for a false community can turn true, and a true community can turn false. Indeed, one danger in any true form of community life is self-confidence and pride which turn toward idolatry and falseness. A true community is a self-critical community, always ready to deflate its pretensions before they balloon up to deity-size. A true community must be ready to criticize its current conception of

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whatever it holds most dear, for at that point the greatest danger of idolatry occurs.

All of this reminds us again that community is finally a religious phenomenon. There is nothing capable of binding together willful, broken human selves except some transcendent power. But not all such power is creative or even benign. What that power is, and what it demands of those who rely upon it—these are factors that determine the quality of a community's life.

Some Myths about Community

Any further effort to define true community and its sources will require the destruction of several romantic myths, myths which have replaced the reality of community in contemporary thought.

There is first the myth that community is a creature comfort which can be added to a life full of other luxuries. For the affluent, community has become another consumer item. You can buy it in weekend chunks at human potential centers, or you and your friends can have it by purchasing a piece of country property.

But, in truth, community is another one of those strange things (like self-health) which eludes us if we aim directly at it. Instead, community comes as a byproduct of commitment and struggle. It comes when we step forward to right some wrong, to heal some hurt, to give some service. Then we discover each other as allies in resisting the diminishments of life. It is no accident that the most impressive sense of community is found among people in the midst of such joyful travail: among blacks, among women, among all who have said no to tyranny with the yes of their lives.

Of all the myths of community, this one will be the hardest to overcome. For the world teaches us to go after what we

want—directly, aggressively, single-mindedly. But community, approached that way, stays constantly beyond our reach. We cannot have it just because we want it—precisely because the foundation of community itself goes beyond selfishness into life for others. Only as our beliefs and acts link us to the invisible community of humankind will the forms of visible community grow up around us.

Another myth tells us that community equals utopia, that in easy access to one another supportive relationships will result and we will find ourselves brothers and sisters again. But community always means the collision of egos. It is less like utopia than like a crucible or a refiner's fire. In this process God wants us to learn something about ourselves, our limits, our need for others. In this process there is the pain of not getting our way, but the promise of finding the Way.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer knew this fact about community well:

> Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a dream wish. . . . God's grace speedily shatters such dreams. Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves . . . God is not a God of the emotions but the God of truth . . . He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial. (*Life Together,* pp. 26-27)

Bonhoeffer is right about the destructive potential of being in love with one's dream of community, and this is why the utopian myth must be denied. For those who come into community with only that dream will soon leave, hurt, resentful, and probably lost to the cause of community-building. But those who can survive the failure of their dream and the abrasion of their egos will find that the reality of community is richer and more supportive than fantasy can ever be. For in

community one learns that self is not an adequate measure of reality; that we can begin to know the fullness of truth only through multiple visions.

The great danger in our utopian dreams of community is that they lead us to want association with people just like ourselves. Here we confront the third myth of community—that it will be an extension and expansion of our own egos, a confirmation of our own partial view of reality. I have often heard it argued that in a real community, the group would have absolute power to select new members and thus control the degree of dissonance within.

But I think not. In a true community we will not choose our companions, for our choices are so often limited by self-serving motives. Instead, our companions will be given to us by grace. Often they will be persons who will upset our settled view of self and world. In fact, we might define true community as that place where the person you least want to live with always lives!

If we live this way we can avoid the trap that Richard Sennett has called "the purified community." Here, as in the typical suburb, one is surrounded by likeness to the extent that challenge is unlikely and growth is impossible. In true community there will be enough diversity and conflict to shake loose our need to make the world in our own image. True community will teach us the meaning of the prayer "Thy will, not mine, be done."

In exploring and exploding each of these myths we are reminded again that true community is a spiritual reality which lies beyond social and psychological principles. If Martin Buber was right that in turning to each other we turn to God, then community is a context for conversion (literally, "a turning"). And what community can convert us to lies on several levels. Community reminds us that we are called to love, for community is a product of love in action and not of

simple self-interest. Community can break our egos open to the experience of a God who cannot be contained by our conceptions. Community will teach us that our grip on truth is fragile and incomplete, that we need many ears to hear the fullness of God's word for our lives. And the disappointments of community life can be transformed by our discovery that the only dependable power for life lies beyond all human structures and relationships.

In this religious grounding lies the only real hedge against the risk of disappointment in seeking community. That risk can be borne only if it is not community one seeks, but truth, light, God. Do not commit yourself to community, but commit yourself to the God who stands beyond all human constructions. In that commitment you will find yourself drawn into community. And in that commitment the difficult lessons of community can be borne and transformed into a larger and truer life.

Forms of Life Together

Clearly community is a process. But it is also a place. When Buber says, "We expect a theophany of which we know nothing but the place, and the place is called community," he suggests how process and place are intertwined. For theophany, the meeting with the living God, is obviously dynamic and full of movement. But for Christians and Jews that meeting always happens in the concrete places of this world. It is important to retain that sense of place lest community become one of those diffuse and disembodied words which excite our imaginations but never confront us with daily reality.

As we consider the forms of community life, we run into the cultural arrogance of the recent communal movement and its assumption that the small, intentional community, withdrawn

from the larger society, is the only worthy form of the common life. Clearly the emergence of such communes is important to us. They do provide models, and they serve as schools for less intensive forms of life together. But they are out of reach for many people. We need to help each other build community where we are, rather than encouraging dreams which turn to despair over a community which for many of us will never be. We need to foster the diverse forms of community which are needed if an urban, technological society is to recover its human roots.

For some of us, the community to build is the family, that ancient unit of common life which has been much-maligned in modern thought. If our efforts are to be honest, however, we must weigh the chances of family life against the economic aspirations which have contributed to the family's failure. For decades the family has been torn apart by our own desires for personal advancement. We have weakened and even destroyed the family by opting for personal mobility and economic success. We will rebuild community in the family only if the lure of achievement can take second place to the cultivation of relations between the generations.

The importance of doing so seems clear and urgent. For many people, the family is the place where the difficulty, even the impossibility, of community is first sensed. If one grows up in a family where attempts at intimacy are frustrated, where trust does not exist and support cannot be found, one becomes an adult fearful of further rejection, an adult who will not risk community again.

If it seems idealistic to suppose that many people will place community of any sort ahead of financial gain, consider that the prospect of shrinking world resources may force us to do just that. Many of us, and our children, will no longer be able to ride up the economic escalator. Unable to move on, we may learn to pay attention to what is around us. And a levelling

economy will compel us to share more fully than we do now—a sharing which means some form of extended family.

The impact of economic trends on family life is nowhere more evident than in the growing aspirations of women for a full and rightful share of both work and compensation. The mothering force that held the family together in previous generations was based partly on the exclusion of women from the ranks of paid workers. As women lay claim to their economic rights, it becomes clear that men must more fully share the tasks of family nurture if the family is to be a model of community life.

That it can be a model of great power seem clear. For example, many of us find it impossible to think about a real community of goods, in which each person contributes resources according to ability and draws out resources according to need. We cannot imagine a community in which we would contribute to the common pot and watch others, regardless of their ability to contribute, take out what they need. Yet those of us who come from strong families do precisely that within the family circle. We have no question that a child or a spouse who earns no money has full claim on our resources for educational needs, medical aid, and so forth. Perhaps we can move toward larger expressions of community by asking how to enlarge our sense of who belongs to the family.

For others among us, the community to build is in our neighborhoods—which tend to be held together more by mortgages and zoning laws than by love of neighbor. And again, most of us want it that way. We want to protect some private space in our busy lives, to stay loose of entanglements with those who live next door, to be free to move without the pain of breaking bonds when job advancement calls us elsewhere.

The breakdown of neighborhoods is directly related to the political health of the larger society. For without local forms of

community it is impossible for people to have true community on a national scale. In political terms, local community is not just a nicety. Instead, it is the source of citizenship, the well-spring of feelings of relatedness, responsibility, and efficacy. The sense of impotence that so many feel today is directly related to the failure of local community; one has no hope of influencing a nation if one does not have a local community to help govern.

In our mobile, metropolitan life, it takes some external force to make a neighborhood become aware of itself as a community. In recent years that force has been the simple fact of change in the racial and economic composition of an area. For the most part, of course, such change has been viewed negatively and defensively. It has caused false community to form, a community which fearfully excludes those who are somehow different.

But more positive outcomes are possible. For several years, in suburban Washington, D.C., there was a project aimed at helping white middle-class people cope with community change. The core of that project was a series of "living room seminars" which brought together ten or fifteen neighbors in an eight week curriculum designed to help them identify and overcome the sources of their resistance to change.

The people in these seminars, once they got past their myths and stereotypes, did not want to run from change but wanted to meet it and learn from it. Their inability to do so resulted largely from their lack of community. The feeling that they stood alone in the confusions of change made them fearful and brittle. Having identified this need in themselves, members of the seminars set out to build community in small but concrete ways. One group, for example, developed a "Neighborhood Resource Catalog," listing the interests and skills that residents would be willing to share with one another. These exchanges themselves were community-builders, and so also

was the simple act of going door to door asking neighbors what they would like to list in the catalog. We need excuses, it seems, to meet our neighbors. But when we do, face to face, community begins to happen, and fear of "those people" begins to recede. In small but significant ways, projects such as these helped neighbors become neighbors. Together, people are able to replace the images of fear with the human face of community.

Others among us may be called to build community in the places where we go to school and work. These have become the major arenas of hierarchy and competition for many Americans. In them we are pitted against one another so that something called "higher performance" may be achieved. But when we destroy the community of work we get unethical products and degrading service. When we destroy the community of scholars, dehumanized teaching and learning are the result. We will build community in these places only if we see that performance at the expense of community is no achievement at all.

Most of us should be deeply challenged by the idea that cooperation rather than competition is the source of genuinely creative work, for we have been programmed to exert the greatest effort in competitive situations where our instinct to win is exploited. Most of us, deep down, believe that education which does not rank individuals in relation to each other is simply not sufficiently rigorous. We are dubious of the benign assumptions about human motivation which lie behind group projects where everyone is supposed to "win," and no one need "lose."

There is some evidence, however, that the group really is more intelligent and perceptive than any single member of it. I think, for example, of those simulation games which pose a problem for individuals to solve on their own and then allow a period of time for those individuals to share and correct each

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other's solution. Almost always the group solution is nearer to the right answer than is the solution of any individual in the group. Often the difference is dramatic. If evidence such as this were taken seriously, the competitive individualism of both school and work might begin to be transformed. And with it, one suspects, would come not only a higher level of personal satisfaction, but also of problem-solving and creativity.

Quakerism and Community

It is ironic to suggest that some of us may be called to build community in our churches, for if we have any model of true community it is the church as it was meant to be. But the church is a human reality as well as divine, and clearly it has failed to be the kind of community God (and some of us) had in mind.

And yet the church, more than any other major institution in our society, still contains the potential for true community life. The symbols of community are there. The tradition of community stands behind us. And sometimes the leadership for community is present as well.

Most important, the church contains a more typical cross-section of people than any institution around, a human diversity which is held together (in theory) by commitment to a transcendent truth. In practice, the church usually tries to suppress the diversity it contains, and when it fails fragmentation is the result. But the church might yet learn to deal with its secondary differences in the context of its ultimate unity. If that were to happen, the church would be the most compelling model of community on the American scene.

I want especially to focus on the contribution to community that might be made by the Religious Society of Friends. I do so not because I think Friends are superior; Friends' meetings are

beset by as many problems and failings as the church in its other forms. I do so because I live and work in the Quaker community at Pendle Hill, and much of what I have learned about community I have learned in this Quaker context. So I focus on Quakerism to express gratitude for what I have been taught, and to raise questions about Quaker community that seem important to me.

The core of the Quaker tradition is a way of inward seeking which leads to outward acts of integrity and service. Friends are most in the Spirit when they stand at the crossing point of the inward and the outward life. And that is the intersection at which we find community. Community is a place where the connections felt in the heart make themselves known in bonds between people, and where the tuggings and pullings of those bonds keep opening up our hearts.

The Society of Friends can make its greatest contribution to community by continuing to be a *religious* society—I mean, by centering on the practice of a corporate worship which opens itself to continuing revelation. Again, community is simply too difficult to be sustained by our social impulses. It can be sustained only as we return time and again to the religious experience of the unity of all life. To put it in the language of Friends, community happens as that of God in you responds to ˅ that of God in me. And the affirmation that there is that of God in every person must mean more than "I'm OK, you're OK."

The silence of the Quaker meeting for worship can be an experience of unity. I am an orthodox, garden variety Christian; I find the image of God first in Jesus the Christ. But it is my joy in the silent meeting to seek with those who find different ways to express the inexpressible truths of religious experience. Words can divide us, but the silence can bring us together. Whatever kinds of community the world needs it surely needs the kind that embraces human diversity.

But in religious mysticism, and in the silence, there are

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dangers as well. The mystical experience of unity is not often manifest in the realm of human relations, and those who seek inward unity may be tempted to flee the imperfections of outward life. And we may be tempted to worship the silence itself, forgetting that silence is meant as a setting in which the true God comes to both comfort and disturb us. Both of these temptations are idolatries, and both of them stand in the way of community. If we try to avoid the problems of human relations, and if we resent voices which break the silence with messages we do not want, then community will be impossible for us.

In a Quaker meeting, for worship or for business, there is more than waiting and silence. There is also speaking for one's self and feeling the weight of the words of others. The quest for truth among Friends is meant to be corporate, not a private reverie. The leading of the gathered group is to be trusted, and when you or I speak we must be willing to test our truth against the truth received by others.

Here is where Friends can contribute to community by refusing to follow the religious individualism of our times. Behind these new movements lies the assumption that truth is totally subjective—one truth for you, another for me, and never mind the difference. But when we understand truth that way then the truth we are given will have no chance to transform society or ourselves. If we affirm community we must take the risk that our partial versions of truth will be enlarged or even made uncouth by the light given to others.

If true community is to flourish then the individual must flourish as well. Here, too, Friends have an important contribution to make. In a Quaker meeting for business there is not only the principle that the group must try to come together under its corporate leading. There is also the principle that the individual must never be overpowered, never put in the position of an outvoted and embittered minority. It is a remarkable

fact that Friends for three hundred years have taken neither the path of religious authoritarianism nor the path of spiritual privatism. Instead, Friends have always accepted both the possibility of individual truth and the obligation of corporately testing that truth.

The truth Friends have been given has led them into some of the hard places of history, places where truth must speak to power. And in these places the living experience of community has been found. Mildred Binns Young, in her Pendle Hill pamphlet, *What Doth the Lord Require of Thee?*, has written of the common life among that first generation of Friends who brought suffering after suffering upon themselves simply by living out their testimonies. She speaks of the fact that under these "all but annihilating persecutions" Friends "drew people to them as [they] never have since" (pp. 5-6). Those Friends did not have to devise fancy schemes for keeping in touch with one another or for enlivening their spiritual life and ministry. Instead, "their necessities kept them together"—such necessities as the need to care for those Friends in prison, and for their stranded children; the need to share what few animals and tools were left after the tax collectors had confiscated most of them; the need to petition authorities for relief from injustice.

"So," writes Mildred Young, "a Friends' meeting, without any theories of communalism, had in effect something like it."

Theory can only provide clues. Community comes from faithful living. If we can life such lives in the context of family and neighborhood, of school and work-place, then we will contribute to the creation of a community both human and divine. There is no testimony more urgent for our day.

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